Voluntary Health Scotland  
Response  

Recipe for Success: Scotland’s National Food & Drink Policy  
Becoming a Good Food Nation – Discussion Document  

Introduction  

Voluntary Health Scotland is the national intermediary for a network of voluntary health organisations and workers. Our members range from large national health charities to small, local service providers, and members’ interests span service planning and provision, prevention, early intervention, self-management, advocacy, and support for service users and carers. We have a diverse and rich membership interested in food-related issues, including food poverty, food advocacy, food messaging and food labelling. This includes a range of perspectives across local community organisations such as Pilton Community Health Project and Wester Hailes Health Agency in Edinburgh, to national organisations such as British Heart Foundation and the Poverty Alliance.  

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Scotland’s National Food and Drink Policy to give you our views on the propositions made and what can be done to take us further on the journey of becoming a Good Food Nation.  

We fully agree that Scotland should be a Good Food Nation. However, we are concerned over the definition of this detailed within the discussion document. The vision outlined does not adequately reflect the priorities, needs and health outcomes of the Scottish people.  

Scotland’s National Food and Drink Policy should be more focused on improving the lives of the Scottish population and on transforming our food culture to ensure that food in Scotland is fair, healthy, affordable, accessible and sustainable for everyone.  

Vision  

While Scotland’s health is improving, there are very different outcomes and experiences of health between different groups of people; the gap in health outcomes between the most and least advantaged groups in society is widening. Tackling this gap needs to focus on the multiple challenges people face and we need to find practical and sustainable responses to these challenges. We need to: tackle poverty and low income; help people to stay healthy and active; ensure services are inclusive and appropriate; and tackle social isolation, promoting social connectedness and encouraging community participation.  

We need to improve Scotland’s relationship with its food to make sure that everyone in society has fair and affordable access to appropriate food and ensure people stay healthy and active.  

Community Food and Health Scotland (CFHS) define food poverty as the impact of a complex combination of barriers on individuals, families and communities, which at different times, in different locations and with differing consequences, inhibit a healthy and acceptable diet. The amount of people experiencing food poverty in Scotland is unacceptable. There
has been a phenomenal increase in the number of people using food banks; this rapidly rose by 400% between April 2013 and March 2014 alone.

The National Food and Drink Policy must adequately respond to increasing food poverty, rising inequality and increasing malnutrition. Consultation with Voluntary Health Scotland member organisations has highlighted a range of issues surrounding food poverty including: access to healthy food and issues surrounding the intricacies of food poverty; access to resources, such as skills and equipment for vulnerable households to prepare and cook affordable food; access to nutritional information; and preventative action to reach people before they hit food poverty and food crisis and subsequently need to access food banks.

Success will be a nation where there is no food poverty; where healthy, affordable food is available and accessible to every citizen.

Discussion document

In particular reference to the discussion document, our experience working with organisations interested in food-related issues leads us to recommend that there needs to be focus on creating an appropriate food culture that reflects the priorities and aspirations of Scottish people rather than on food exports and attracting overseas visitors.

We advocate the need for The National Food and Drink Policy to use human rights-based language to reflect a person-focused and person-centred approach to tackling food poverty and inequality. The discussion document details that one of the remaining significant challenges lies in “deep-seated attitudes to food leading to poor habits and low expectations”. A conceptual shift is needed away from the stigmatisation of individuals, to tackling upstream underlying social determinants behind unhealthy food choices.

The voluntary health sector also strongly encourages collaborative working across Scottish Government directorates and across all sectors, especially the third sector. We recommend partnership working with health and social care directorates to ensure that the priorities are to sustain and improve people’s health, especially across disadvantaged communities where food poverty and inequality and most prevalent.

We particularly advocate working with third sector partners, community food initiatives and communities to ensure that people are part of the solution and that barriers are tackled in an inclusive and empowering way.

Further Information

Thank you for considering the comments discussed in the above response to the consultation on Scotland’s National Food & Drink Policy. Should you wish to contact Voluntary Health Scotland regarding the contents of this response, please direct enquiries to Susan Lowes, Policy and Engagement Officer at susan.lowes@vhscotland.org.uk, 0131 474 6190.

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